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LETTER DATED 9 JUNE 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I reproduce herewith a message from my President, His Excellency Mr. Isaias Afwerki, addressed to you as President of the Security Council, concerning Ethiopia's declaration of war against my country and the grave consequences of its push for an all out war. The message was faxed to me this morning.

"Your Excellency is aware that the Government of Ethiopia had declared war on Eritrea pursuant to the resolution passed by its Parliament on 13 May 1998. The Government of Ethiopia has been attempting to execute this resolution by unleashing continuous attacks in several areas along the border between the two countries. Ethiopia has also been issuing additional ultimatums and war threats to reinforce this declaration.

The Ethiopian Government has aggravated the crisis by starting an air strike against Asmara, Eritrea's capital, on 5 June 1998. Its endeavours to strangulate Eritrea by attempting to cut off commercial air traffic, as well as maritime access to the ports of Massawa and Assab by threatening to wage indiscriminate air strikes in Eritrean airspace, is an act of war and has created a very dangerous situation.

Ethiopia surely cannot keep hostage the Eritrean people and the international community by these illegal threats and bluffs. The international community should not tolerate and acquiesce to these unlawful acts, but deplore them in the strongest possible terms, as well as take the requisite action to put an end to these illegal practices. The Government of Eritrea underlines the fact that Ethiopia will bear full responsibility for the consequences that may ensue if this dangerous situation is not checked.

Isaias Afwerki
President
The State of Eritrea"

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I also enclose a press release on the fresh attacks by Ethiopia this morning, and the threats of a widening war (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

Annex

Press Release issued by the Government of Eritrea on
9 June 1998

Ethiopia launches a fresh attack in the Zalambesa area

The Ethiopian army has launched a fresh attack on Eritrean positions in the Zalambesa area. The attack started at around 5.15 this morning.

Ethiopia has been stepping up preparations for this attack since last Thursday (4 June 1998) when it publicly announced that it had given orders to the country's armed forces to take action against Eritrea. These preparations have involved bringing reinforcements of manpower and heavy artillery to the area. Ethiopia has also been insisting that all foreigners leave Asmara to pave the way for its plans to mount indiscriminate air attacks on the civilian population.

The Ethiopian attack comes only a day after Eritrea had renewed its call, at the Organization of African Unity summit in Ouagadougou, for the cessation of all hostilities and the start of direct talks in the presence of high level mediators.

The Government of Eritrea condemns this fresh attack, which is yet additional proof that Ethiopia is bent on war. It had earlier unleashed five attacks in the past two weeks. In what was a dangerous escalation of border skirmishes into a wider conflict, Ethiopia had started air attacks on Asmara on 5 June last week. Violating Eritrea's sovereignty, Ethiopia has virtually imposed a blockade of Eritrea's airspace and port activities by threatening to attack commercial aircraft entering the country, as well as civilian vessels calling at the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa. This act of war is intolerable to any sovereign State.

The Government of Eritrea once again underlines that force cannot resolve the dispute whose only solution lies in peace and legality. While reiterating its call for a cessation of hostilities, the Government of Eritrea affirms that it has no option but to confront these attacks resolutely in order to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as Ethiopia doggedly persists in launching a wave of offensives in line with the declaration of war that its Parliament announced on 13 May 1998.